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The University of Montana

NEWS RELEASE

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April 21, 1994

UM POLL GAUGES MONTANANS' VIEWS ON GUN CONTROL

MISSOULA --

Despite Montana's reputation as a "gun state," most Montanans apparently favor some degree of gun control, according to the latest Montana Poll conducted by The University of Montana Bureau of Business and Economic Research.

While most Montanans oppose a nationwide ban on the sale of handguns, clear majorities apparently support the recently enacted Brady law and would favor a nationwide ban on assault weapons, said Susan Selig Wallwork, the bureau's director of survey research. Somewhat fewer endorse the idea of treating firearms like vehicles, requiring owner testing and licensing and annual registration of guns. Whatever their stand on gun control issues, Wallwork said, most Montanans are emphatic.

The Montana Poll was based on telephone interviews with 405 adult Montanans conducted April 7-14 by the Bureau of Business and Economic Research. Poll findings include:

■ **Brady Law.** Six respondents in 10 (62 percent) said they favored the Brady Bill, recently passed by Congress. The law calls for a background check on prospective purchasers, which can lead to a waiting period of up to five days. Roughly one-third of the respondents opposed the law, and only 6 percent were undecided. Even among gun-owner households, a clear majority -- about six in 10 (59 percent) -- expressed support, while roughly four in 10 (38 percent) said they were opposed. Support for the Brady law was noticeably higher (75 percent) among households without firearms.

-more-

Support for the Brady law was evidenced among virtually all respondent groups. Support tended to increase with education; college graduates were among the most supportive (73 percent). Support decreased somewhat with age and with tenure in the state, but even among older Montanans (over age 44) and longtime residents (more than 30 years), roughly six in 10 favored the law.

Women and Democrats expressed strong support (72 percent and 71 percent, respectively), with self-described liberals the most supportive (78 percent). Among the least supportive of the Brady law were Republicans (54 percent), self-described conservatives (52 percent) and men (50 percent).

Support for the law was generally consistent throughout the state, with east and west and urban and rural regions expressing comparable levels of support.

■ **Assault Weapons and Handguns.** A nationwide ban on the ownership, sale and manufacture of assault weapons drew support throughout the state, even among those least supportive of the Brady law. Overall, almost seven respondents in 10 (66 percent) favored such a ban, with 27 percent opposed and only 7 percent undecided. Gun-owner households were similarly supportive (64 percent in favor and 31 percent opposed).

The most support again was expressed among college graduates (77 percent), households without firearms (75 percent) and Democrats (74 percent). As with the Brady Bill, public opinion did not differ noticeably from region to region. Even among men and conservatives, who expressed only mild support for the Brady law, roughly six in 10 supported a nationwide ban on assault weapons. Republicans were less supportive (53 percent) of a ban.

However, Montanans do not appear ready to support a nationwide ban on the sale of handguns, Wallwork said. Overall, only about one respondent in four (24 percent) supported such a ban, with about seven in 10 (69 percent) opposed and 7 percent undecided.

On this issue, gun-owner households were among the most opposed (79 percent), as were conservatives (78 percent) and Republicans (75 percent). Men expressed the most pronounced opposition -- 82 percent. Women, while among the least opposed to a handgun ban, still were opposed (57 percent).

The only category in which a majority favored a handgun ban was among no-firearm households; about five in 10 favored a ban, and four in 10 were opposed.

■ **Testing, licensing and annual registration.** Montana public opinion appears to be divided about a firearms system that would parallel motor vehicle policy by requiring testing and licensing of gun owners and annual registration of firearms. Overall, roughly five in 10 (49 percent) expressed support for such an approach, while almost as many (43 percent) were opposed. Again, few were undecided (8 percent).

Support was strongest among Democrats (56 percent), households with annual incomes lower than \$15,000 (59 percent), college graduates (62 percent), women (64 percent), liberals (65 percent), Montanans under age 35 (67 percent) and households without firearms (78 percent).

Opposition was strongest among Republicans (51 percent), gun-owner households (52 percent), conservatives (53 percent) and men (60 percent).

■ **Gun ownership in Montana.** About two Montana households in three (68 percent) have a firearm in the home, and about two-thirds of these Montanans say their firearms are mainly for

sporting use, not protection.

By contrast, a 1993 Gallup/CNN/USA Today poll found that about 48 percent of households nationwide had a firearm in the home. Earlier, a 1989 CBS News poll estimated gun ownership at 52 percent of American households nationwide, with a slightly greater percentage in the western United States (56 percent) -- well below the current estimate for Montana. However, the 1989 poll paralleled the Montana Poll in finding that roughly two in three gun-owner households had firearms for sporting purposes rather than protection.

■ **Butte shooting incident.** The April 12 fatal shooting incident at a Butte school occurred late in the interviewing period for this poll. However, a comparison of the overall results before and after the event indicated no significant shifts in opinion on the four issues.

Poll respondents were selected using the BBER's two-stage random sampling process. A random digit telephone sampling program generates a statewide sample of telephone numbers, proportionate with the distribution of households in the state. A second random sampling procedure is then used to select one adult respondent in each household, taking into account the number and gender of adults in the household. The procedure generates a representative cross-section of Montana's adult population. The sample size is sufficient for a maximum overall error margin of plus or minus 5 percentage points.

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SJkr
State and weeklies
Gunpoll.rl

MONTANA POLL

Bureau of Business and Economic Research, The University of Montana (Missoula, Montana 59812).

Sample: Adult residents of Montana (n=405)

Poll dates: April 7-14, 1994

	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>Undecided</u>
Brady Bill. Calls for a background check on anyone who wants to purchase a handgun and can result in a waiting period of up to five days.			
All respondents/households (n=405)	62%	32%	6%
Households with firearms (n=275)	59%	38%	3%
Households without firearms (n=116)	75%	14%	11%
Nationwide ban on the ownership, sale, and manufacture of assault weapons.			
All respondents/households (n=405)	66%	27%	7%
Households with firearms (n=275)	64%	31%	5%
Households without firearms (n=116)	75%	16%	10%
Nationwide ban on the sale of handguns, except those issued to law enforcement officers and other authorized persons.			
All respondents/households (n=405)	24%	69%	7%
Households with firearms (n=275)	15%	79%	6%
Households without firearms (n=116)	50%	41%	9%
Testing and licensing of gun owners and annual registration of guns, in same way automobile drivers are licensed and their vehicles registered.			
All respondents/households (n=405)	49%	43%	8%
Households with firearms (n=275)	39%	52%	9%
Households without firearms (n=116)	78%	16%	6%

NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.